

THE SECOND MISTRESS

The second mistress must have arrived during the night. For when I came downstairs the next morning, she glared at me from the corner of the family room, as if I, not she, was the unwelcome guest.

I resisted an urge to charge across the room and slap her smug face. Instead, I aimed a question at the kitchen table. "Why her?"

The paper rustled, but its handler declined to emerge. "Because she's the best."

"How do you know? Did you sample her?"

My husband lowered the paper, and folded his hands. "As a matter of fact, I did. I took her through all her moves until I was completely satisfied." A wolfish grin crossed his face. "That's why she's here."

With a hiss, I turned my back and gazed again at her gleaming profile. She looked so young, so sleek, like a fashion model from New York. Dressed in black from head to toe, she epitomized sophistication. Hatred burned in my veins. I could never compete. For the second time in my life, I felt capable of murder.

"You want to try her?"

I grimaced at his attempt to include me. I had no desire to turn her on, to push her buttons, to gaze in wonder at her fancy tricks. I tried to make my answer civil. "You've got to be kidding!"

"Come on. I promise. You'll fall for her too."

I didn't bother turning round. I could feel her gaze, challenging me, taunting me. I vowed to extract my vengeance later. I knew just the tool, a direct hit of Pledge. "How much did she cost?"

"I got a smoking deal."

"How much?"

"For what she's worth, not much."

"She was a floor model then?" I knew how he worked.

He hesitated then admitted it. "Yes."

"So, she's used."

"Yes, but they extended her warranty."

"Of course they did." A used model required a close-up scrutiny. Hands on hips, I gave her the once over. Much to my delight, I spied a scratch no bigger than a needle on her torso. Ha! So, she wasn't Miss Perfect after all.

Hot breath tickled the back of my neck. I rotated and caught my husband in the act of adoration. Pain ripped through my heart. The scar wouldn't diminish his infatuation. Out of wifely habit, I reached out and closed his gaping mouth.

Funeral bagpipes whined in my head as I watched my beloved plunge into his first mistress's leathery embrace. A moment later, he picked up a rectangular gadget the size of a large Hershey's Bar, and pushed...the... button. A palette of color sprung to the second mistress's cheeks. The sophisticated New Yorker had transformed into a sparkling showgirl. I slumped in the nearest chair, hypnotized against my will.

Sometime later, I managed a few hoarse words. "Pass me the remote."

My husband chuckled softly then obliged my request.